D639
E3 M8

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5

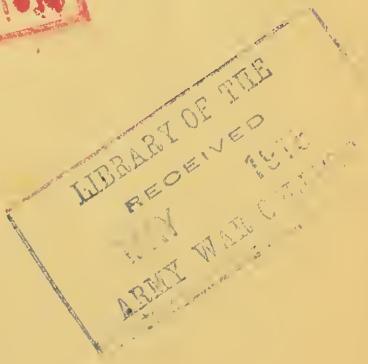
539
3 M8
py 1

WHAT THE WAR MEANS TO EDUCATION

CONVOCATION ADDRESS
GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
FEBRUARY 22, 1918

BY

JAMES PHINNEY MUNROE



WASHINGTON, D. C.
1918

By Transfer
APR 12 1919

DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE NEW YORK

D639
.E3M8

WHAT THE WAR MEANS TO EDUCATION

During the first year of the Great War in Europe, Dr. Sadler, a chief authority on education, wrote me to the effect that, even then, the War had pushed forward education in England at least two generations. Parliament is still divided over the passage of the comprehensive Education Bill in which that advance is to be recorded; but, whether crystallized into legislation or not, the great change is there in Great Britain and will sooner or later make its way into fundamental law.

Since England has much farther than this country to travel in the matter of education, it is impossible for us to accomplish any such forward strides as she. But even should this war end within the year—an event which unhappily seems most unlikely—it will have left an indelible impress upon American education. The changes in teaching aims and teaching methods within the next twenty-five years are to be, I believe, profound; and, while it cannot be said that those changes had their root in conflict, for they were impending before 1914, it is the war which has brought them into public recognition, and it is the war which will so hasten their progress as, four years ago, would have seemed beyond belief.

The old world passed out of existence in that tragic August of four years ago. The world in which you young men and women will play your part is

one as different from that into which I entered as mine differed from that of the eighteenth century. The last thirty-five years have seen changes in the scales of American social, business and intellectual life vast in their magnitude; and now, with the ending of this greatest of wars, there will be a new leap forward, not only on the side of industry and commerce, but still more in those things which affect the social, emotional and educational life of the people.

Meanwhile we live in the midst of paradox. We are seeing, on the one hand, such national expenditure as, five years ago, was declared impossible. On the the other hand, we are experiencing an absorption in economies and a cheerfulness in deprivations of which we believed ourselves incapable. We are witnessing preparations for the taking of human life on a scale which it was asserted this people would never countenance or bring themselves to pay for. On the other hand, we are developing such an interest in the safeguarding of human life as seemed beyond the powers of this happy-go-lucky people. We are going through the greatest proportional depletion of our schools and colleges since the Civil War; yet never before has the public interest in and concern for education been so acute as now.

These apparent paradoxes are, in fact, not such at all. They are merely the two sides of a single shield, and one is, in fact, the inevitable corollary of the other. In order for the good things involved in economy of living, in care for human life and in sound education, to be understood and worked for, it seemingly was necessary for our nation to be brought face to face with the awful facts of reckless expendi-

ture, of waste of human life, of threatening disaster through ignorance or through lack of a due reserve of highly skilled and highly educated men. And the silver lining to this hideous cloud of devastating war is found in the fact that out of its dreadful sufferings and wastes and long-enduring evils will come, in time, a thrift, a regard for individual life and a confidence in the power of real education that will not only be new to this Country, but, in its effect upon coming generations, will be so beneficial as almost to offset the manifold evils of the War.

The education of my boyhood time, owing to tradition, inertia and a general ignorance as to what education means, was largely one of waste. We wasted well-intentioned effort upon perfectly fruitless things. We wasted the time of child and youth upon work that meant as little to us as it did to them. We shrank from "wasting" money in experimentation, but delighted in spending ten times as much upon traditional teaching the very source of whose tradition had for generations been forgotten. We wasted our natural resources and taught coming generations how to continue that waste in exaggerated forms. And, worst of all, we wasted that most precious of all national assets: human ability and human energy, with almost drunken prodigality. That we survived this national orgy, that we are today richer and more powerful than ever before, is testimony to the soundness not of our methods, but of our national birthright and of mother nature.

To have gone on with this social and educational waste, however, for another generation or two would have brought us unfailingly to the brink of national

bankruptcy. Already we were getting alarmed about the shrinkage in our forests, our coal and our many other natural endowments. Already we were beginning to measure and weigh the oncoming generation and to find alarming portents in its diminishing vitality. Already we were asking ourselves why we should protect our vegetable, and not our human growths; why we should have elaborate laws for the preservation of hogs, and none for the preservation of boys and girls. And some of us were even daring to question the sacredness of our educational traditions and to wonder if it were really ordained of Heaven that the child should be fitted to the educational process rather than that the educational process should be fitted to the child.

Upon this shadowland of questioning and doubt, burst the Great War; and, as is the habit of catastrophes, brought us face to face with naked and appalling facts. That we found ourselves unprepared to deal with such an enemy as Germany, who has made war a supreme business for half a century, is perhaps to our credit; but it is greatly to our discredit that we could not rise quickly to a vast emergency, whatever might be its origin or character. We found ourselves to have become, through great riches and much absorption in them, slothful and self-indulgent. We found that our sons and daughters knew more about motor-cars than about creative work. We learned that our governmental machinery was rusty with age and circumlocution. We discovered that, far from having unlimited agricultural and mineral resources, a few months, or even a few weeks, might bring us to national starvation and death from cold.

And we found ourselves compelled to take exact stock of our human energy, to count it out, individual by individual, for service in battle, in the factory and on the farm, and, to our increasing alarm, we are discovering that those human resources have a very definite limitation both in numbers and in fitness for the tasks that they must do. So, practically for the first time in our haphazard American life, we are facing the inexorable fact that we have been a nation wasteful beyond all others and that this waste must stop. And that stopping can come only through an education which is no longer wasteful, and through a focusing of that education to a large degree upon the problems of preventing wastes.

Education, after the great War, will no longer be, I believe, a spendthrift in itself and a praiser and promoter of extravagance. It will be, on the contrary, an education conserving the pupil's time, his individuality and his special aptitudes and talents; it will be one that, directly and indirectly, will fix attention upon certain great fundamental wastes which must no longer be permitted, and the prevention of which is a thing worthy of the best efforts of mankind.

The supreme acquisitive years are those between birth and majority, and in those years the physical and mental health, the character, the aims, and practically the life career of the individual are for all time determined. Yet a large proportion of those precious twenty-one years are now thrown away, because of the ignorance of parents as to what education means, because of the adherence of schools to traditions which have meant nothing since medieval

days; because of our fear of teaching immediately practical and useful things; because of our queer notions that work is a curse and that play has no training value; because we create vast educational plants and then use them to one-fifth of their capacity; because, in short, we do not take a human being seriously until he becomes a man, until the precious period in which he might have been made a real man and an effective citizen has irrevocably passed.

The first lesson that education itself must learn is that it is a serious business: serious, because it deals with the prime asset of mankind; a business because it has a certain definite task to do, and a limited time in which to do it, and should conserve every minute and every resource of that short training period. Most current education cannot presume to call itself, however, either serious or businesslike; for it leaves four-fifths of its task to be performed haphazard, on the streets and in by-ways; because it still regards the child as a mechanism to be fitted into its stereotyped machinery, not as a human intellect and soul to be individually developed; because it sublimely ignores all the experience and teaching of other businesses; because, while spending a great proportion of the national revenue, it feels no obligation to render any specific returns for those expenditures, and makes no study of the efficiency of the output of its vast and costly mechanism.

The War will almost have been worth while if, through the lessons it will teach, our complex educational systems come to realize that they must make themselves really efficient, by using their plants to capacity; by supervising the whole training of the

child, in school and out; by making use of the immense educative power both of real work and of real play; by teaching those who are to be the fathers and mothers of the future how to make homes and how to fulfil their obligations to society; by developing children into self-respecting citizens not only by training them for democratic citizenship, but by carefully helping them to make for themselves a real place in the social and economic world.

More than this, education in the United States after the War will utilize, I believe, to a degree far beyond present experience, numerous aids and forces outside the school. The home is much more interested in educating the child than is the school; yet at scarcely a single point do these chief elements in the upbringing of the boy and girl come into cooperation or even into contact. The community has everything at stake in this matter of education, for upon the quality of its citizenship its happiness and prosperity depend; yet, except though a school board or an occasional interested citizen, the community is as remote from the inside of the schoolhouse as it is from the steppes of Turkestan. Industry must depend for its welfare wholly upon the kind of youth who come to it as workers; yet only in extremely rare instances do the school which is training the coming generation and the industries whose future lies in the hands of that new supply of workers, come together for the common end of making youth competent for this vast business of producing and distributing goods essential to human well-being. Outside every schoolroom and every college hall is a great field of nature, of agriculture, of manufacturing, of

political and social experience. Associated with all those human activities are thousands of men and women, not only competent, but eager to share effectively in the work of the schools. Yet they and the school and college faculties are as far apart as the antipodes. In every city, and especially in one like Washington, are huge collections, libraries and other fountains of knowledge which are being used only by a few institutions such as yours. Those citizens, those industries, those vast storehouses of knowledge should be made part and parcel of the educational system of the whole United States, and we should regard as clearly defrauded that child, who, as a part of his elementary education, that youth who, as a part of his secondary and college training, that student who, as a part of his professional preparation, has not had every opportunity to get the use of some or all of these almost untouched sources of true learning. The term 'social education' is still a strange one to most of us; but in it lies the whole economic, intellectual and moral future of this Country. If the coming generation is to be educated to take its proper and effective place in the vast complex of modern society, it must have as its teachers, not merely some few men and women paid to hear lessons and to give formal lectures; it must have the teaching of all the varied forces of modern social and industrial life, it must be brought, as far as possible, into real contact with all the elements which are building, out of the resources of nature and of man, an ever more complicated, ever more efficient, and ever more spiritual world.

By the catacylsm of this great War, the forces of industrial and social life, the intellectual activities, and, above all, the spiritual emotions, of human society have been stirred to their uttermost limits. Before, we skated on the surfaces of things; now we are looking into their illimitable depths. Before, we regarded industry as a means for making money; now we perceive it to be one of the essential formatives of human society. Before, we looked upon human beings as automata, and their education as a sort of hocus-pocus with little relation to mental or spiritual life; now we know that every individual is precious and that his personality and its right development are essential elements in the Divine scheme. Out of this welter of battle and preparation for battle is to come to all the world, and especially to this new part of it, teeming with wealth of body and mind and soul, widespread self-searchings and profound self-revelations. From those will be born, in the proximate generations, such poets, such artists, such men of science, such philosophers, such great intellectual and moral leaders, as will make this materially great Country of ours enduringly great. For the vast stores of grains and minerals, the wealth of cities, the labor and the striving of mankind exist, not for the heaping up of gold and the creating of things and more things; they exist as the rich source and fruitful menstruum out of which, in each succeeding generation, emerge a few master minds, a few discoverers, a few real poets, a few high spiritual leaders, who, by their work, their inspiration, and their compelling example, raise their generation one step higher in the great, continuous uplift of the world. And I

confidently believe that the time will come, after the hurts and sorrows of this great War have been in some measure healed, when we in the United States will, to use Lincoln's fine phrase, "solemnly rejoice" that by this cataclysm we were shaken to our very foundations and that out of those deep and catastrophic national emotions were born the supreme men and women who, I am certain, will issue, directly or indirectly, from this world-wide conflict, and who will make this beloved nation of ours not only the leader, but also the great exemplar of mankind.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 020 914 331 8

Hollin
pl

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 020 914 331 8

Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5